

STATEMENT OF
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NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
BEFORE THE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER RESOURCES AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee today to discuss two watershed projects of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) that are being considered for authorization. Before turning to them, let me provide the Subcommittee a brief overview of the program.

The Small Watershed Programs have served America well for over 50 years. Together the programs authorized under P.L. 83-566 and P.L. 78-534 have improved the environment, increased economic development, reduced threats from floods, and helped develop the infrastructure on which many rural people and communities depend.

Local units of government and other sponsoring organizations initiate watershed projects with the help of conservation districts and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Local steering committees guide the planners, helping establish planning objectives, priorities, and selecting the final plan. Governors review the project applications to assure they are consistent with state plans and programs. Local governments provide land rights, secure construction permits, pay a share of construction costs, and maintain the project.

Watershed projects with any single structure having a storage capacity greater than 4,000 acre feet require approval of this committee. I am pleased to appear before you today and request approval of two watershed projects, the East Fork of the Grand River Watershed in Missouri and Iowa and the Upper Delaware and Tributaries Watershed in Kansas.

EAST FORK OF THE GRAND RIVER WATERSHED

The East Fork of the Grand River Watershed plan was prepared in accordance with the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act of 1954, P.L. 83-566. Under this Act, we are giving the highest priority to planning and approving projects that provide multi-purpose benefits such as those found in this project. The recommended plan for the East Fork of the Grand River includes the installation of numerous multi-purpose structures to reduce flood damages; improve management of cropland, forest land and grassland; improve fish and wildlife habitat; provide water supply; and provide recreational opportunities. There are 14 active, non-federal sponsors of the project representing four counties and two states.

The East Fork of the Grand River Watershed is located in Ringgold and Union Counties, Iowa and Harrison and Worth Counties, Missouri and is 168,400 acres in size (Iowa--103,400 acres and Missouri--65,000 acres). The population within the project area is approximately 2,200.

The major problems in the watershed include reduced farm income and increased government service costs caused by floodwater, sedimentation in the floodplain, floodplain scour, and serious erosion problems in the upland areas of the watershed. The total average annual damage is \$4,339,200 (1995 figures).

There also exists a lack of a dependable rural water supply for the agricultural community. This project lies within a region that is affected by a limited supply of water for all uses. Water for domestic use in the watershed is obtained primarily from well systems. During periods of drought, wells and surface water supplies for livestock go dry.

The project components for the East Fork of the Grand River Watershed consists of 220 small flood water retarding dams (4-11 acres); a 20 acre lake for flood water detention, a 100 acre public lake in Missouri for flood water detention, wildlife and recreation; a 350 acre public lake in Iowa for water supply, flood water detention, wildlife and recreation; 344 grade stabilization structures; 10,500 acres of improved land treatment and erosion control; and 89 dry hydrants for rural fire protection.

The plan calls for the project to be completed during a six-year period, pending available appropriations. The estimated cost for the project is \$20,908,400 of which \$16,755,000 or 80 percent will be paid from P.L. 83-566 funds. The benefit/cost ratio is 1.35:1.

UPPER DELAWARE AND TRIBUTARIES WATERSHED

The second project I wish to recommend for approval is the Upper Delaware and Tributaries Watershed in Kansas. This watershed plan was also prepared in accordance with the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act of 1954, P.L. 83-566. The recommended plan for the Upper Delaware and Tributaries Watershed includes flood water retarding dams; multi-purpose dam; water supply; waste management systems; improved management of cropland and forest land; riparian easements; and recreational opportunities.

The plan was formulated to reduce flood water damages; to meet state water quality criteria; to provide an adequate water supply for the Kickapoo Tribe; and to provide public water-based recreation. There are seven active, non-federal sponsors of the project.

The Upper Delaware and Tributaries Watershed is located in Atchison, Brown, Jackson, and Nemaha counties, in Kansas, and is 177,180 acres in size. The upper reaches of the Delaware River originate near Sabetha, Kansas, and flow southeast toward Muscotah, Kansas. Three main tributaries begin in southeastern Nemaha County and flow southeast merging into the Delaware River in Brown and Jackson Counties. From Muscotah, the river flows downstream approximately 18 miles to Perry Lake, a Corps of Engineers' reservoir. Sabetha, population 2,500; Fairview, population 320; and Powhattan, population 140, are located in the watershed. Muscotah, Whiting, Netawaka, Wetmore, and Goff are towns with populations of less than 300, each located just outside the watershed.

The dominant problems identified in the project area are: rural flooding; water quality impairment; lack of a dependable water supply; and the lack of adequate water-based recreation. Annual flood damages to the 11,900 acre floodplain are: (1) crop and pasture, \$321,200; (2) other agricultural, \$51,200; (3) scour, \$58,800; and (4) roads and bridges, \$53,400. Nonpoint source pollutants impair watershed stream use for aquatic life and contact and non-contact recreation. The nonpoint source pollutants are phosphorus, nitrates, suspended solids (primarily soil), organic matter, and fecal bacteria. The lack of a dependable water supply causes economic losses on businesses and livestock producers during periods of drought. It also hampers the recruitment of business and industries with jobs to the Kickapoo Indian Reservation. Recreation studies of northeast Kansas also show an unmet demand for water-based recreation.

The principal project measures include: 20 flood water retarding dams; one multi-purpose dam with recreation facilities; 11,000 acres of conservation land treatment; 1,000 acres of riparian and other forest land practices; 200 acres of riparian easements; and 16 livestock waste management systems.

The plan calls for the project to be completed during a 16-year period pending available appropriations. The estimated cost for the project is \$13,659,500 of which \$9,487,700 or 69.4 percent will be paid from P.L. 83-566 funds. The benefit/cost ratio is 1.20:1.

Conclusion:

These two projects are examples of the kind of work that we are accomplishing under the Small Watershed Program. Both projects demonstrate the kinds of environmental, economic and social benefits NRCS seeks to gain in accordance with Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA). As the next millennium approaches, we have the opportunity to build upon our past success and learn from our failures in the re-dedication of our efforts to conserve the land. I would like to take the opportunity to report to this committee some concerns regarding the lifespan and aging infrastructure of existing watershed structures.

Many of the small watershed structures that NRCS assisted local sponsors construct are nearing the end of their design life. Approximately 1000 structures are at least 40 or more years old. Some need repair, rehabilitation, replacement, or decommissioning. Over time, the areas surrounding the structures have changed. These changes include development in the floodplain; changes in land use surrounding the structures and deterioration of the structural components. In other cases, Federal and State dam safety

regulations have changed. Clearly, local sponsors and other project stake holders will eventually have to address the environmental, public safety, liability, social, economic, and funding issues that have come from these changes. Continued deterioration of the \$8.5 billion infrastructure established by P.L. 78-534 and P.L.83-566 projects will have a major negative effect on the economies and living conditions in rural America.

The magnitude of the problems will increase as the infrastructure continues to age unless actions are initiated to sustain these systems. The effects go beyond the local sponsors. Many of these structures play a significant role in lengthening the life span of large dams as well. To respond to these concerns, the President's budget request for FY 1999 contains \$1 million in funding to provide education to local communities about maintenance needs and to ensure that the public is aware of the expectations for structural performance.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, we ask for your approval of these projects and continued support for the Small Watershed Program. It is quite clear that the vision and needs of the local communities have been well crafted and articulated in these proposals. As we have seen throughout the P.L. 83-566 and P.L. 78-534 programs, the gains that can be achieved for both the environment and for the health and vitality of the communities demand our support and attention. The local sponsors have worked hard to define their goals and hope for the future in these proposals and so many others. It is my hope that we can match the hard work of the communities with the federal resources that will make the plans into reality.